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The Two John Knoxes: England, Scotland and the 1558 Tracts

by JANE E. A. DAWSON

The tracts which John Knox wrote in 1558 are regarded as the core of his political writings and the key to his entire political thought.¹ The most famous – and infamous – of his works, *The First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women*, was published in the spring and was followed in July by *The Letter to the Regent (Augmented)*, *The Appellation* and *The Letter to the Commonalty of Scotland*.² These tracts have suffered from two serious misconceptions. The first is the natural tendency to link all the 1558 material together and in particular to treat the *First Blast* and the July tracts as a unified whole. This has distorted the meaning of all the pamphlets and led to vain efforts to mould them into a composite unit which can then be labelled ‘Knox’s political thought’. In fact, it is extremely important to separate them and to make a sharp distinction between their intended audiences and purposes. Crucially, the *First Blast* was written primarily for an English audience and the July tracts intended for a Scottish one.

The second misconception, the result of historical hindsight, has produced an anachronistic approach to Knox’s writings and has destroyed the proper historical context of each of his tracts. It is the assumption, frequently made, that Knox must have written with a revolution in mind because a revolution actually occurred in Scotland during 1559–60, when the Lords of the Congregation overthrew the Regency and themselves assumed power. This muddles the eventual outcome of the particular Scottish situation with Knox’s ideas at an early stage in its evolution.

I am most grateful to Professor J. K. Cameron, Dr R. Mason and Ms M. Shephard for commenting upon an earlier version of this paper and providing many helpful suggestions, though they may not agree with some of the arguments expressed here.

¹ For example, the latest collection of Knox’s writings: *The Political Writings of John Knox*, ed. M. A. Breslow, Cranbury, NJ 1985.

² As Breslow does not print any of the original sidenotes to the text, the best edition remains *The Works of John Knox*, ed. D. Laing, 6 vols, Edinburgh 1846–64 (hereinafter *Works*). Vol. iv contains all the 1558 tracts.

In 1558 Knox did not know he was about to assume the role of hero of the Scottish Reformation.

The 1558 tracts were all completed and published before any prospect of real change seemed to exist either in the English regime or in the Scottish government. In both countries Catholic power appeared unchallenged, though different policies were pursued towards Protestants: rigorous persecution in England and relative tolerance within Scotland. Knox responded in separate ways to the problems of the two countries and his expectations for each nation were correspondingly different. He wrote his tracts hoping for a revolution in England and planning for gradual change in Scotland. Yet in London change came in the unspectacular guise of a new monarch when Elizabeth I succeeded to the throne on 17 November 1558. In Scotland Knox returned in May 1559 to find himself taking part in a revolution. This was the exact opposite to what he had imagined at the beginning of 1558 and of the analysis which had informed his writings during that year.

When the distorting spectacles of the Scottish Revolution of 1559–60 and the false assumption that the *First Blast* was specifically directed towards the changing situation in Scotland are removed, a new, convincing and consistent message emerges. The three July tracts offered advice and encouragement for the Scots in the confusing situation of the spring and summer of 1558. They also advocated a programme of action for all Scottish Protestants. If these writings are placed within their precise historical context a better understanding of their meaning ensues. That Knox was a more consistent thinker than is usually assumed, is also demonstrated.

By 1558 there were two Knoxes: Knox the Scotsman by birth and Knox the Englishman by adoption.³ As is well known, John Knox spent most of the decade after 1549 in England or in the company of Englishmen and Englishwomen. After his release from the French galleys he became minister at Berwick-upon-Tweed and at Newcastle.⁴ He later moved to London preaching at court and throughout the home counties. Knox fitted remarkably easily into the radical wing of the Edwardian Church. He was busy doing what he did best – preaching the Word and ministering to congregations of the faithful. At Mary's accession in 1553 he went into exile on the continent with his fellow Edwardian Protestants. Like many of the other English preachers, he felt considerable guilt about abandoning his English flock and wrote a series of pamphlets to comfort

³ This phrase has been borrowed from J. H. Burns, 'John Knox and Revolution', *History Today* viii (1958), 566. The perceptive points which Professor Burns made in this article and his other writings on Knox (see below nn. 6, 44, 60) have not been properly appreciated.

⁴ The standard biographies of Knox cover his movements, though none of them produces a full and accurate itinerary of his exile: E. Percy, *John Knox*, London 1937, sections 3, 4; W. S. Reid, *Trumpeter of God*, New York 1974, chs. vi–viii; J. Ridley, *John Knox*, Oxford 1968, chs. vi–xvi.

and exhort his congregations and to justify his own withdrawal.⁵ He was equally concerned at England's religious plight and questioned his Swiss hosts about possible methods of overturning Queen Mary's Catholic policies. Even as early as 1554 Knox was prepared to consider varieties of resistance as a way to tackle the English situation.⁶ He took a leading part in the bitter dispute among the exiles at Frankfurt and as a result was expelled from the city. In November 1554 he went to Geneva, which became his base for the remainder of his exile. Throughout this period Knox moved among the other English exiles, becoming minister to their congregations at Frankfurt and Geneva and immersing himself in the problems of the English exile community.

This phase of Knox's life was interrupted by his celebrated Scottish trip in 1555-6. The return to Scotland was unplanned. He had originally gone to the north of England at the request of his mother-in-law, Mrs Elizabeth Bowes. It was probably at this time that he formally married her daughter Marjorie and then crossed the border in search of a safe place for them to stay. Once in Scotland he was astonished at the progress of Protestantism and the number of underground congregations which welcomed him. His trip turned into a triumphant missionary tour. As he explained to Mrs Bowes:

Gif I had not sene it with my eyis in my awn contrey, I culd not have beleivit it... the fervencie heir doith fer exceed all utheris that I have sene... for depart I can not, unto sic tyme as God quenche thair thirst a litill. Yea, Mother, thair fervencie doith sa ravische me, that I can not but accuse and condemp my sleuthfull coldness.⁷

Despite the obvious success of this progress and the protection he had received from sympathetic members of the Scottish nobility, Knox decided to return with his wife and mother-in-law to Geneva. His return to exile confirmed, not any lack of courage, but rather that at this point in his life his strongest ties were with the English rather than the Scottish Protestants. His explanation for leaving Scotland was that the English exile congregation in Geneva, 'commanding him in God's name, as he was their chosen pastor, to repair unto them, for their comfort'.⁸

The following year Knox again demonstrated a marked reluctance to assume the mantle of 'The Scottish Reformer'. A group of Scottish noblemen had written to him in March 1557 inviting him to come to Scotland. He received the letter in May but procrastinated until late September, finally having to be told by Calvin and other pastors in

⁵ These were his *Declaration of the True Nature of Prayer*; *Exposition upon the Sixth Psalm*; *Godly Letter of Warning*; *Two Comfortable Epistles*; and *A Faithful Admonition*, written between Jan. and Aug. 1554: *Works*, iii.

⁶ Knox had addressed a series of questions to Bullinger and Calvin on the matter of resistance: *Works*, iii. 217-26; J. H. Burns, 'Knox and Bullinger', *Scottish Historical Review* xxxiv (1955), 90-1. ⁷ Knox to Mrs Bowes, 4 Nov. 1555, *Works*, iv. 217-18.

⁸ *John Knox's History of the Reformation in Scotland*, ed. W. C. Dickinson, 2 vols, Edinburgh 1949, i. 123.

Geneva: 'That he could not refuse that vocation, unless he would declare himself rebellious unto his God, and unmerciful to his country.'⁹ By the time Knox arrived at Dieppe at the end of October another letter had arrived from the Scottish nobility instructing him to delay his journey. Knox remained for several months at his 'listening-post' in the French seaport receiving the latest news of events in England, Scotland and France. By the winter of 1557-8 he was being pulled in different directions. He remained loyal to his English congregations and his family but was becoming involved in developments in Scotland. Never a man to remain idle, he was also becoming concerned for his hosts and friends in the French Protestant community. Whilst awaiting further instructions Knox wrote to the Scottish Lords and composed most of *The First Blast of the Trumpet* as well as editing and arranging for the English translation of *An Apology for the French Protestants*.¹⁰ He then made a wide circuit through Huguenot France, finally reaching Geneva by the summer of 1558.

Thus there were two Knoxes. The first the man who had been absorbed into the struggles of the English Protestant Church under Edward and Mary and had become an Englishman by adoption. The second was Knox the Scotsman by birth who was both confused and pleased by his recent discovery that the Protestant cause was flourishing in his native country and that a number of influential Scots were looking to him for leadership. Although he possessed two distinct voices, Knox had only one aim, that of seeing Protestantism established in both England and Scotland. He was dedicated to achieving this goal and was prepared to employ all manner of arguments and persuasions to convince the English and the Scots. His absolute commitment gave him both the passion to argue his case and the flexibility to adopt those two distinct voices. The two John Knoxes were united in a single religious purpose. In 1558 Knox wrote in both his personae. In the spring the *First Blast* was published anonymously, but from the pen of Knox the Englishman. In July Knox the Scotsman wrote, signed and had printed his three Scottish tracts. He addressed each of his countries in separate works, adapting his message to suit their very different circumstances. The tracts for Scotland and the *First Blast* are normally treated as a single unit and have suffered from the conflation of the two John Knoxes.

The greatest confusion has arisen over the purpose of Knox's *First Blast*, which discussed the question of whether or not women were ever permitted to rule. It has been assumed that the work was addressed to an international audience or at least to both the kingdoms of England and Scotland, which were ruled by women. The subject was of universal interest and when treated as a matter of general principle it was eminently suitable for an international readership. However, this is where the error has crept in. The subject matter and the type of argument employed in the *First Blast* have been confused with its proposed audience and the

⁹ *Ibid.* i. 131-6, at p. 133.

¹⁰ *Works*, iv. 297-347.

programme of action which Knox wished certain of his readers to adopt. The tract's arguments were plainly universal and international, but the intended audience was very specific. Knox addressed the people of England and urged them to remove their queen, but he employed broad general arguments to convince them.

In order to prove his case Knox chose to argue from a basic principle – that a woman should not rule a kingdom. This proposition had universal application, was supported by a wide variety of examples and fitted into an already well-established debate.¹¹ Knox's ideas on female rule were bound to be read and noted by an international audience. He probably welcomed such a wide readership, though no attempt was made to translate the work into the international language of Latin, and he initially tried to keep his authorship secret. What mattered far more to Knox than the general circulation of his views was that the purpose of the *First Blast* be achieved. His aim in writing the book was to convince the English people by his rational arguments and to incite them to depose their queen. Knox was more concerned about the programme of action he hoped would follow his appeal than his intellectual contribution to the debate upon female rule. The arguments themselves were available for general consumption but their 'application' was directed solely at the English.¹² The negative aspect of Knox's purpose is even more important. Although he employed examples from Scotland and Scottish history Knox did not intend that the *First Blast* should be 'applied' immediately in Scotland because he was not directly addressing the Scots. In his writings to the Scottish nobility Knox never assumed that because Scotland also possessed a female ruler she should automatically be deposed. In the July tracts he had a very different message for the Scottish people. Despite its wide-ranging arguments the *First Blast* was directed solely towards the English.

The tract was written for a single audience because its specific aim was the removal of Mary Tudor. When explaining himself on 4 September 1561 to another Queen Mary, the Scottish sovereign, Knox excused his work by saying,

for in very deed, Madam, that book was written most especially against that wicked Jezebel of England... If the realm finds no inconvenience from the regiment of a woman, that which they approve shall I not further disallow than within my own breast, but shall be as content to live under your Grace as Paul was to live under Nero; and my hope is, that so long as that ye defile not your

¹¹ For the debate see C. Jordan, 'Women's rule in sixteenth-century British political thought', *Renaissance Quarterly* xl (1987); J. E. Phillips, 'The background to Spenser's attitude toward women rulers', *Huntington Library Quarterly* v (1941–2), 5–32; P. L. Scalingi, 'The scepter and the distaff: the question of female sovereignty, 1516–1607', *The Historian* xli (1978), 59–75; R. L. Greaves, *Theology and Revolution in the Scottish Reformation*, Washington 1980, ch. viii and Mandy Shephard's forthcoming thesis.

¹² The 'application' of a text to the contemporary political situation was a feature of many Protestant sermons, particularly in King Edward's reign. See J. N. King, *English Reformation Literature*, Princeton 1982.

hands with the blood of the saints of God, that neither I nor that book [*First Blast*] shall either hurt you or your authority.¹³

His defence did not impress Mary, Queen of Scots. She could not accept that his generalised attack upon female rule might be excused on the grounds that it was directed at Mary Tudor. Her fellow monarch, Queen Elizabeth of England, was in complete agreement.¹⁴

Knox's contemporaries recognised that the *First Blast* was aimed primarily at Mary Tudor. Those who sought to refute or explain away his arguments acknowledged that the book would have been acceptable if his propositions had remained as specific as his target. As John Aylmer explained, Knox's mistake was to go beyond the attack upon Queen Mary and to include all female rulers. Aylmer was even willing to concede that, 'if he had kept him in that particular person [Mary] he could have said nothing to(o) much, nor in suche wyse, as could have offended any indifferent man'.¹⁵ In the opinion of many contemporaries Knox had committed a cardinal error by failing to restrict his fire to Queen Mary. His inclusion of all regnant queens and his general statements on the subject of gynaecocracy produced a wide variety of defences of female rule. None of the subsequent refutations defend Mary Tudor and her regime.

The accession of Elizabeth to the English throne, providing yet another queen regnant, deepened the embarrassment of the Protestant exiles over Knox's generalised attack. Elizabeth was greeted as the new Deborah who would lead the English Church back into the light after the darkness of Catholicism. In their struggle to find favour with the new queen the Protestants who hastily returned from exile sought to distance themselves from Knox's untimely outburst against female rule. Encouraged by the other exiles, Aylmer rushed off his glowing defence of Elizabeth and the

¹³ *John Knox's History*, ii. 15 and see below n. 74. In the 1550s when Knox used the Old Testament example of Jezebel it was always with reference to Mary Tudor.

¹⁴ Knox also wrote directly to Queen Elizabeth, 20 Jul. 1559: *Works*, vi. 47-50. His letter was taken, carefully annotated and its main points refuted: BL Add. ms 32,091, fos 167-9.

¹⁵ J. Aylmer, *An Harborowe for faithfull and trewe subiectes*, Strasbourg 1559. sig. B2. The refutations of Knox fell into two categories, those written by contemporaries and fellow exiles within a few years of the appearance of the *First Blast* and those written considerably later, usually with the defence of Mary Queen of Scots in mind. Most of the first group defended Knox personally whilst attacking his views on female rule. Aylmer's book was written in the 'more in sorrow than in anger' style and he was at pains not to criticise Knox himself: *Harborowe*, sig. B1. Lawrence Humphrey also strove to exonerate Knox: *De religionis conservatione et reformatione vera*, Basle, 1559, 100, trans. in M. Knappen, *Tudor Puritanism*, Chicago 1970 ed., 176-7. John Foxe's letter to Knox is now lost, but the reply gives some indication of the criticism which he made of the *First Blast*: *Works*, v. 5-6. John Jewel was rather harsher on Knox when he was defending the Protestant cause from Harding's attack in his *Defence of the Apology* in *The Works of John Jewel*, ed. J. Ayre, 4 vols, Cambridge 1845-50, iv. 664-5. The most interesting refutation was by Richard Bertie, BL Add. ms 48,043, fos 1-9. I am most grateful to Mandy Shephard for discussions with her on the Bertie manuscript and for allowing me to read the relevant portions of her thesis in advance.

English constitution.¹⁶ The Confession of Faith which was presented to the queen in January 1559 roundly declared that the Scripture did permit women to rule. These efforts to cleanse themselves from the taint of Knox, Goodman and even Geneva itself were not entirely successful. Years later Calvin and Beza were still complaining that Queen Elizabeth remained unsympathetic because of their supposed association with Knox and his views.¹⁷

The unfortunate timing of the *First Blast* was not lost on Knox. Even he admitted, in his own letter to Queen Elizabeth, that his target had been her half-sister and tacitly acknowledged that he had employed arguments which he would now be willing to modify: 'My conscience beareth me record, that maliciouslie nor of purpose I never offended your Grace nor your realme...my booke tuichest not your Grace's person in especiall, neyther yit is it prejudiciall to anie libertie of the realme, if the time and my writing be indifferentlie considered.' He offered the new English queen what he regarded as a reasonable compromise on the subject of female rule – one which Elizabeth did not feel inclined to accept!¹⁸

It was ironic that Knox's attempt to broaden his attack upon Mary into a general principle should subsequently have caused him so much trouble. By the winter of 1557 Knox and most of his friends in the English exile community were convinced that Queen Mary should not be allowed to continue her disastrous reign in England. From 1556 a whole range of works advocating resistance were written.¹⁹ They employed a wide variety of arguments but all advanced the same proposition – that Mary should be removed from her throne. Knox's *First Blast* was an important part of a general radical movement within the English exile community. The Marian exiles responded to the immense pressure of their unique situation by producing a series of revolutionary works.²⁰ In its specific aim his tract was seeking precisely the same result as was sought by his English

¹⁶ Although he valued Elizabeth as a person, Aylmer was not particularly complimentary about the capacity of women to rule. He argued that England was safe in female hands because it enjoyed a mixed monarchy and was governed by the laws and not solely by the monarch; *Harborowe*, sig. H3.

¹⁷ The joint statement of faith presented by the exiles to Elizabeth also declared that the principle of female rule was consonant with Scripture: Knappen, *Tudor Puritanism*, 172. However, despite the mild attacks, Knox wrote to Mrs Anne Locke on 6 Apr. 1559, 'my First Blast hath blowne from me all my friends in England': *Works*, vi. 14. Calvin and Beza both felt that they were unfairly associated with the English exiles' views and that in consequence Queen Elizabeth was suspicious of all their friendly gestures towards her: *Zurich Letters*, ed. H. Robinson, 2 vols, Cambridge 1842–5, ii. 34–6, 131.

¹⁸ *Works*, vi. 48, and n. 14 above.

¹⁹ For a general discussion of these see G. Bowler, 'Marian Protestants and the ideal of violent resistance to tyranny', in P. Lake and M. Dowling (eds), *Protestantism and the National Church*, London 1987, 124–143. For the way in which events in England affected the exiles see B. Peardon, 'The politics of polemic: John Ponet's *Short Treatise of Politic Power* and contemporary circumstance, 1553–6', *Journal of British Studies* xxii (1982), 35–49.

²⁰ For a full discussion of this pressure see J. Dawson, 'Revolutionary conclusions: the case of the Marian exiles', *History of Political Thought* xi (1990), 257–72.

colleagues. Where he differed from his fellows was not in his aim nor his intended audience but in the arguments he chose to accomplish their common purpose.

In the *First Blast* Knox rested his case exclusively upon general propositions concerning female rule. He sought to produce a non-sectarian argument to support Queen Mary's deposition. He was deliberately attempting to extend his audience to include all Englishmen and not confine his appeal to the godly minority. To achieve this aim he widened his particular attack upon Mary into a general condemnation of female rulers. Knowing that her gender was a source of considerable disquiet for Catholic and Protestant alike, he concentrated on the demonstrable fact that she was a female ruler.²¹ By fixing upon the broad question of female rule Knox could appeal to men of all religious and political persuasions.²² He could shift attention away from the bitter divisions concerning the queen's policies and on to the problem of her 'unsuitable' sex. The English queen could not remove the disadvantages which contemporaries believed accompanied all members of the female gender. Such constraints produced peculiar difficulties for a ruler, as the political implications of Mary Tudor's marriage had demonstrated.²³

Once Knox's premise that only men were capable of ruling a kingdom was accepted, his conclusions were inevitable. Irrespective of her policies Mary could never be a suitable monarch, simply because she was female. That inescapable biological fact ensured that a compromise or settlement with Mary could not be negotiated or even contemplated. The queen must be removed and replaced by a male ruler. Knox's spotlight upon Mary's gender enabled him to present his argument and conclusions in the simple black and white terms which he relished.²⁴ In his mind the purpose of the *First Blast* was to present a case against Mary based on law, logic and reason, in themselves non-controversial and widely acceptable authorities. He also sought to provide an explanation, which did not rest upon purely Protestant assumptions, for the disasters England was experiencing under Mary's rule. The arguments against female rule seemed to fulfil both these criteria extremely well. They gave Knox the opportunity to convince as wide a range of the English 'political nation' as possible by his rational arguments and, by mobilising their support, to

²¹ For an example of some of the difficulties which might arise see C. Levin, 'Queens and claimants: political insecurity in sixteenth-century England', in J. Sharistanian (ed.), *Gender, Ideology, and Action*, New York, 1986, 41-66.

²² Stimulated by his dislike of Mary and her Catholic policies, Knox had been mulling over the question of female rule since 1554. It had been the subject of one of the famous questions which he had asked of Bullinger and Calvin that year. See above n. 6.

²³ For the consequences of Mary's marriage to Philip of Spain see D. M. Loades, *The Reign of Mary Tudor* (London, 1979), chs iv, vii.

²⁴ On 18 May 1559 Knox wrote to Foxe, 'to me it is yneugh to say that black is not whit, and man's tryannye and foolishnes is not Goddes perfite ordinance': *Works*, v. 5. For this general approach see R. Mason, 'Knox, resistance and the moral imperative', *History of Political Thought* i (1980), 411-36.

remove the English Queen from her throne. The reasons for choosing the general argument instead of a particular and personalised attack upon Mary were tactically sound, though perhaps in the circumstances rather shortsighted! The switch to a non-sectarian approach presented in an ordered and rational way was one which George Buchanan, the Huguenots and the Dutch were to employ to great advantage twenty years later.²⁵

Knox's strategy for presenting a calm and rational case for Mary's deposition should have been a great success. However, the main problem for Knox in the *First Blast*, as elsewhere, was that this task did not come easily to him. When he strove to be rational Knox reverted to the training of his university days and his grounding in the syllogistic methods of the 'schools'.²⁶ This had a dampening effect upon his usually ebullient style and made the opening section of the book ponderous and boring. Knox began with a formal proposition:

To promote a Woman to beare rule, superioritie, dominion, or empire above any Realme, Nation, or Citie, is repugnant to Nature: contumelie to God, a thing most contrarious to his reveled will and approved ordinance; and finallie, it is the subversion of good Order, of all equitie and justice.²⁷

He then proceeded to demonstrate the truth of his proposition in the time-honoured manner by adducing a large number of examples and proofs. Knox normally preferred to rely solely upon Scripture to validate his points and would rarely acknowledge any other source for his ideas.²⁸ Departing from his usual practice in the *First Blast*, he was prepared to appeal to any and every argument from authority: the workings of nature, divine law, the hierarchical ordering of society, and justice and equity. He cited a wide range of sources, including Aristotle, Augustine and the Roman Law.²⁹ The very fact that he was willing to support his case by referring to texts other than the Word of God demonstrated his desire to reach and persuade as many Englishmen as possible.

Knox was unable to sustain the style of calm exposition, and periodically slipped into passionate exhortation. The first time he caught himself and apologised to his readers: 'Albeit I have thus (talkinge with my God in the anguishes of my harte) some what digressed'.³⁰ He strove to continue but found the greatest difficulty in restricting himself to measured proofs. The image suggests itself of Knox writing at his desk, his face becoming redder by the minute until he could contain himself no longer and his prose exploded into prophetic fury against Mary Tudor.

²⁵ Q. Skinner, 'The origins of the Calvinist theory of revolution', in B. C. Malament (ed.), *After the Reformation*, Manchester 1980, 309-30.

²⁶ For Knox's polemical style see D. Murison, 'Knox the writer', in D. Shaw (ed.), *John Knox*, Edinburgh 1975, 33-50.

²⁷ *Works*, iv. 473. There are assorted modern editions of the 'First Blast', none of which is as satisfactory as Laing's edition.

²⁸ Greaves, *Theology and Revolution*, ch. i; R. Kyle, *The Mind of John Knox*, Lawrence, Kansas 1984, ch. ii. ²⁹ For example, *Works*, vi. 374-6, 383-4. ³⁰ *Ibid.* 396.

The arguments of the *First Blast* changed from rational assertions supported by legal and historical examples to biblical exposition and exhortation. The style became livelier and the tempo of the book quickened. Knox was a master of righteous denunciation. Because 'the power of rebuking magnificently produces great polemic', this change ensured a dynamic and hard-hitting book.³¹ Unfortunately, it also guaranteed that it would fail to achieve its initial purpose of a calm and rational case for the deposition of Mary Tudor.

The manner of Knox's failure makes it easier to explain why the *First Blast* provoked such a storm of protest throughout Europe. The basic argument of the book was that women were not fit to rule over kingdoms. This was conventional wisdom and by itself did not justify the opprobrium heaped on Knox. In the sixteenth-century debate he was part of the 'conservative' group which resisted the new and radical idea that women were capable of ruling. The precise nature of his views on women has been analysed extensively elsewhere and in this particular context are less important than his willingness to enter that debate and his whole style of presenting his case.³²

The intellectual content of Knox's arguments was neither particularly original nor startling, but his method of using and applying those assertions shocked his contemporaries deeply. They were upset by the way in which he transformed his relatively uncontroversial basic premise into an immutable law. The identification of absolute laws was a technique which he had borrowed from his Old Testament exegesis.³³ He used it to establish rigid rules, which must be obeyed because they were endowed with all the authority of a direct divine command. By tying his rules to the absolute authority of God Himself, Knox sought to place them beyond doubt or contradiction. Any variations permitted by local laws, habit or custom could then be ignored. The rules were declared to be absolutely binding and applicable to each and every circumstance, place and person. This elevation of a rule to the status of an immutable law removed the possibility of compromise. Knox could then present the case as a matter of stark alternatives, obedience or disobedience to a great principle of law. In the *First Blast*, as in most of his other works, Knox was intent upon establishing a single absolute rule which permitted no exceptions. Having fixed this law, Knox could designate any deviation as 'monstrous' and insist that it be removed.³⁴ He could then declare that the rule itself was a categorical imperative for action, which was the message he was so concerned to ram home.

Knox used this method to insist that male rule was a universal and inviolable law which could never tolerate an exception. As such, it should

³¹ The aphorism from C. S. Lewis is cited in E. G. Rupp, 'The Europe of John Knox', in Shaw, *Knox*, 6-7. ³² Jordan, 'Women's rule', 426; and above n. 15.

³³ R. Kyle, 'John Knox's methods of biblical interpretation: an important source of his intellectual radicalness', *Journal of Religious Studies* xii (1986), 57-70.

³⁴ Jordan, 'Women's rule', 436.

always override any contrary national laws and customs, particularly in the highly sensitive area of hereditary succession. This in itself was a profoundly worrying statement, but what upset contemporaries even more was the revolutionary practical conclusions Knox drew from this position. He was convinced that if an immutable law were broken it was necessary to remedy the lapse without delay. Unless immediate action was taken, Knox argued, the whole system of divine and human law would be made ridiculous and placed in jeopardy. According to his premises a female ruler was ineligible for rule and so was by definition a usurper. Having no legitimate title or qualification, a woman who called herself queen should be deposed immediately. These conclusions flowed from Knox's basic premises. He then rigorously applied them to the particular contemporary situation of the English monarchy.

Contemporaries were naturally alarmed by this move from theoretical argument to practical political action. Knox did not hesitate to point out that England's possession of a reigning queen was a direct breach of the general principle forbidding female rule. The contravention of a universal law could not be tolerated and was extremely dangerous to the whole kingdom. The integrity of that law and with it the whole principle of order needed to be re-established. This could only be achieved by the immediate removal of Queen Mary. Knox declared that the English, 'oght, without further delay, to remove from authority all such persons as by usurpation, violence or tyrannie, do possesse the same... They oght to remove frome honor and authoritie that monstre in nature... a woman against nature reigning above man... They oght not to feare first to pronounce, and then after to execute against them the sentence of deathe'.³⁵ As everyone was well aware, Knox was specifically calling upon the English people to depose and execute Mary Tudor forthwith. The same message, though employing a different set of arguments, was being proclaimed by other English exiles such as Ponet, Goodman and Gilby.³⁶ What horrified Europe was the unequivocal and radical demand for the removal of the present English monarch.

Knox's explicit call for immediate revolutionary action was directed at England and it was not intended to apply to Scotland too. When this is understood, the other 1558 tracts can be recognised as a separate Scottish whole. These works comprise Knox's angry reply to the Scottish Lords in October 1557, his more constructive and conciliatory letters of December and then the three open and published letters penned in July 1558. When they are taken together a distinct and consistent pattern emerges. By

³⁵ *Works*, iv. 416.

³⁶ Christopher Goodman had said, 'it is lawfull for the people, yea it is their duty to do it [punishment] themselves, as well as upon their own rulers and Magistrate as upon other of their brethren': *How Superior Powers Oght to Be Obeyd*, Geneva 1558, 189-90; J. Dawson, 'Resistance and revolution in sixteenth-century thought: the case of Christopher Goodman', in J. van Berg and P. Hofstijzer (eds.), *Church, Change and Revolution* (Publications of the Sir Thomas Browne Institute New Series, xii), Leiden 1991, 69-79.

removing the distracting voice of Knox the Englishman, his Scottish message can be heard loud and clear.

In this period the Scottish Lords were seeking advice on how to consolidate the surprising gains already made by Protestantism.³⁷ They looked to Knox for a programme of action for the future, and wanted him to return to Scotland to lead their campaign in person. Between March 1557 when they sent their initial request and the autumn when they asked him to wait, the Lords of the Congregation, as they called themselves after the First Band of December 1557, had changed their minds about Knox's immediate return. This was a tactical decision about timing and not a change of direction. The Lords were reacting to the changes in the political climate, particularly in the attitude of the regent, Mary of Guise.³⁸ Their request that Knox wait for a better opportunity to return did not merit his angry outburst. There is a suspicion that, having had to be pushed very hard to accept the invitation in the first place and having keyed himself up to face the danger, Knox's anger arose as much from his own ambivalent reaction to the delay as from the political reasons behind it. The Lords and Knox were of one mind about the broader strategy to be followed, although they might disagree as to the appropriate tactics. They all accepted that the main task was to ensure that Protestants could worship openly and safely in Scotland. Once the full recognition and toleration of Protestantism was achieved, it was assumed that the innate superiority of their faith would bring complete victory.

Knox was particularly concerned that the Protestant cause should not be contaminated by political considerations. At this stage all his advice to the Lords emphasised the need for pure religious motives; hence his suspicion over the delayed return. He wished to ensure that the campaign for Protestant worship would not be associated with sedition or treason. Although in later letters his attitude towards the civil authorities became increasingly bitter, Knox was always adamant that there should be no *direct* or offensive attack upon the young Scottish queen or her mother the regent.³⁹ This was most clearly stated in the letter of 17 December to the Scottish Lords:

nane of yow that seik to promote the glorie of Chryst do suddanlie disobey or displeas the establissit Autoritie in things lawfull;... I exhort yow, that with all

³⁷ For the situation in Scotland see G. Donaldson, *The Scottish Reformation*, Cambridge 1960, ch. ii; I. Cowan, *The Scottish Reformation*, London 1982, chs v-vi; and for the composition of the Lords of the Congregation, G. Donaldson, *All the Queen's Men*, London 1983, chs. ii-iii.

³⁸ The First Band was signed on 3 Dec. 1557: *John Knox's History*, i. 136-7. On the regent see R. Marshall, *Mary of Guise*, London 1977, chs ix-xi.

³⁹ The burning of Walter Myln (28 Apr. 1558) provoked Knox to harsh criticism of the regent and the archbishop of St Andrews: *John Knox's History*, i. 153 and the 'Additions' revealed a much sharper edge to his comments than in his original *Letter to the Regent*, *Works* iv, 431-60. Myln's execution was part of the hardening of the regent's attitude made possible by the celebration of Mary Queen of Scots' marriage to the French dauphin on 24 Apr. 1558: J. Wormald, *Mary Queen of Scots*, London 1988, 89.

simplicitie and lawfull obedience, joynit with boldnes in God, and with open confessioun of your faith ye seik the favours of the Autoritie, that by it (yr possibill be) the cause in whilk ye labour may be promotit, or at the least not persecuted.⁴⁰

Knox's positive proposals also strove to maintain a sharp distinction between the Catholic Church and royal authority. In the long-standing Protestant tradition he asked for a public disputation on points of contention between himself and the Roman Catholics.⁴¹ He also reiterated his hope that the queen regent would see the light and embrace the true religion herself. If not, she would face the eternal consequences of her blindness, a fate he was happy to spell out at some length in the augmented version of his *Letter to the Queen Regent*. Such things needed to be said despite the fact that Mary of Guise's conversion was extremely unlikely. These dire warnings to the monarch and her regent were essentially personal rather than constitutional. At this stage Knox was more concerned about the soul of the ruler than her qualification to rule. He was threatening Mary of Guise with damnation and not with deposition. Within a Scottish context Knox had not yet moved to the belief that the ruler's Catholicism in itself made her unfit to govern, though he had already adopted that attitude towards the English situation. It took six tumultuous months in the middle of the Wars of the Congregation for Knox's views on the Scottish constitutional position to develop to the point where he felt able, in October 1559, to justify the suspension of Mary of Guise as regent by the Lords of the Congregation.⁴²

Having made his obligatory appeal to the regent, Knox, with more practical considerations in mind, turned his attention to the Scottish nobility and the common people. He wanted the nobility to establish Protestant worship, a goal which had been discussed during his visit and had been fiercely debated by the leading Scottish Protestants throughout 1557. The precise programme of action which he envisaged was set out in the letter of 17 December. Following directly on from his advice first to seek the assistance of the civil authorities, Knox explained,

whilk thing, efter all humill request yf ye can not atteane, then, with oppin and solempn protestatioun of your obedience to be gevin to the Autoritie in all thingis not plainlie repugnyng to God, ye lawfullie may attempt the extreamitie, whilk is, to provyd, whidder the Autoritie will consent or no, that Chrystis Evangell may be trewlie preachit, and his halie Sacramentis rychtly ministerit unto yow, and to your brethren, the subjectis of that Realme.⁴³

The 'extremity' to which he referred, establishing Protestant worship without the consent of the civil government, had been the main theme of discussion among the Scottish Protestants, and Knox was advocating the direct and more radical approach. However, it does seem rather pallid

⁴⁰ *Works*, iv. 284–5. At the end of 1557 Knox wrote three letters to the Scottish Lords: 27 Oct., *John Knox's History*, i. 133–6; 1 Dec., *Works*, iv. 261–75; 17 Dec., *ibid* 276–86.

⁴¹ *Ibid*. 524. In the *Appellation* Knox even set out the rules for the disputation, 518–19.

⁴² *John Knox's History*, i. 249–56.

⁴³ *Works*, iv. 285.

when compared with the extreme measures of deposition and regicide which Knox was simultaneously recommending to the English.

In the Scottish context Knox was prepared to go one step further. Having established public Protestant worship, the Lords should then defend its practice against persecution by the Catholic Church and even against the secular authorities. After conceding this point Knox immediately warned against the danger of turning the right to defend true religion into political rebellion:

And farther, ye lawfullie may, yea, and thairto is bound to defend your Brethrenne from persecution and tyranny, be it aganis princes or empirouris, to the uttermost of your power, provyding alwayis, as I haif said, that nether your self deny lawfull obedience, nether yit that ye assist nor promot thois that seik autoritie and preminence of wardlie glorie.⁴⁴

In the *Appellation* Knox expounded at considerable length the whole range of duties of the nobility or inferior magistrates, especially in respect to religion.⁴⁵ In practical terms he wanted the nobility to establish Protestant worship and defend it. He also urged them to remove and punish the Catholic clergy so that the people were no longer deceived by false doctrine. In the last resort the nobility must be prepared to defend Protestantism against all threats, even those from the crown. Knox drew a sharp distinction between defending the true religion and a full-scale offensive to establish it throughout the kingdom. He wanted the Protestant nobility to establish true worship within their households and the areas which lay under their direct control. He urged them also to protect the preachers who ministered to them. What Knox was suggesting was the type of spirited support and defence put up by Archibald Campbell, fourth earl of Argyle, on behalf of his minister John Douglas who was accused of heresy by Archbishop Hamilton, the primate of Scotland.⁴⁶ Knox was not yet ready within a Scottish situation to employ the idea of the right to defend the true religion as a justification for a revolution to establish Protestantism throughout Scotland.

Following the lead set by the godly nobility, Knox also envisaged a role for the common people of Scotland and he addressed one of his letters specifically to them.⁴⁷ He told them to demand the establishment of public worship. In the first instance they should not themselves seek to accomplish that task but should support and urge the nobility to do it for them. Knox explained,

althoghe ye be but subjectes, (you) may lawfully require of your superiours, be it of your king, be it of your Lordes, rulers, and powers, that they provide for you true Preachers...if in this point your superiours be negligent, or yet pretend to

⁴⁴ Ibid. See J. H. Burns, 'The political ideas of the Scottish Reformation', *Aberdeen University Review* xxvi (1955-6), 256-8.

⁴⁵ *Works*, iv. 48of.

⁴⁶ *John Knox's History*, i. 138, ii. 246-54.

⁴⁷ *Works*, iv. 523-40. Knox addressed 'his beloved brethren the Communalitie of Scotland': p. 523.

maintaine tyrantes in their tyrannie, most justly ye may provide true teachers for yourselves, be it in your cities, townes or villages: them ye may maintaine and defend against all that shall persecute them.⁴⁸

This was a considerably more limited area of action and responsibility than that permitted to the nobility. The common people should support and defend their Protestant minister, but they were not expected to establish public reformed worship by themselves. The first action secured true doctrine and was, therefore, a matter of faith. It could be performed by the common people. The second was a public action affecting the ordering of the commonwealth and so entered into the civil and political sphere. It could only be performed by those who held civil office and so the common people had no authority to undertake a change themselves: that was a task for the nobility.

Knox derived the religious duty of the common people from his belief in the religious equality of all men. There were no social distinctions before God in the matter of salvation; every man, however humble, was entitled to seek out the true faith which would save him. This was a fundamental Christian liberty enjoyed and exercised by all men. Knox rousinglly declared, 'Beloved Brethren, ye are Goddes creatures, created and formed in his own image and similitude... For albeit God hath put and ordered distinction and difference betwixt the King and subjects... yet in the hope of the life to come he hath made all equall.'⁴⁹

In his view true faith was nourished by the proper food of the soul – the Word of God. The preaching of the Word was the main task of the Protestant minister and so access to a 'true Preacher' was essential to the spiritual welfare of every individual. Knox's whole case was based upon the *religious* equality of all men. The fundamental Christian liberty which belonged to each individual to hear the Word of God did not extend to the political arena. He categorised the full establishment of Protestant worship as a matter of public and social organisation and not of religious liberty. Consequently, he was prepared to allow the common people to maintain and defend a minister but not to establish Protestant worship. The religious equality of all Christians was to be exercised within narrowly defined limits.

In addition to maintaining a minister Knox asked the common people to withhold their tithes from the Catholic Church. This would gravely weaken the ecclesiastical institution by starving it of funds. By presenting it as a tax-strike to force the clergy to do their job properly, it could be justified as a means of protecting the faith:

Ye may, moreover, withold the frutes and profetts which fals Byshoppes and Clergie most injustly receyve of you, unto such time as they be compelled faithfully to do theyr charge and duties, which is to preach unto Christ Jesus truely, ryghtly to minister his Sacramentes according to his own institution, and so to watche for the salvation of your soules.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Ibid. 534.

⁴⁹ Ibid. 526–7.

⁵⁰ Ibid. 534.

The violence of the language which Knox employed to describe the Catholic clergy and the people's attitude towards them has obscured the limited nature of the demands he actually made for action by the common people. They did have a part to play in the 'reformation of religion', but it was a strictly subordinate one, and Knox always justified their participation by reference to a universal religious equality. The very restricted possibilities for popular action were a direct consequence of this premise. What is noticeable by its absence is any mention of the special obligations of every member of a covenanted nation which gave each individual the right and the duty to act for himself in both political and religious matters.⁵¹

At one level, the Scottish programme of action was very radical. Its aim was nothing less than the swift establishment of public worship, and full toleration and recognition of Protestantism. This was to be achieved by increasing pressure upon the regent and, if that failed, by direct action by the nobility and to a lesser extent by the common people. What Knox demanded in his 1558 tracts was that the Scottish Protestants should come further out into the open. To some extent the plan reflected what was already happening in France.⁵² In certain areas of strength the Huguenots were worshipping and organising more openly, despite a much harsher royal attitude than prevailed in Scotland. In both countries the main target was the Catholic Church and its clergy. The Protestants asserted that they were loyal subjects of the crown and made no attacks upon the secular government.⁵³ In all his letters Knox heaped abuse upon the Catholic priesthood and sought their complete destruction, but he carefully avoided any direct threat to the civil authorities.

If Knox's radical programme had been followed in Scotland it would have had very serious and violent consequences leading eventually to armed confrontation. It would have been impossible to maintain the distinction which Knox wished to make between an attack upon the Catholic Church and one upon the civil authorities. However, whatever the practical outcome, on an ideological level the programme fell a long way short of a call for an immediate insurrection. In Scotland Knox advocated a policy of mounting pressure to establish Protestantism. It

⁵¹ For a full discussion of the covenant argument see Dawson, 'Resistance and revolution' and idem, 'The Early Career of Christopher Goodman and his place in the development of English Protestant Thought', unpubl. PhD diss., Durham 1978.

⁵² R. M. Kingdon, *Geneva and the Coming of the Wars of Religion in France, 1555-63*, Geneva 1956; C. Eire, 'Prelude to sedition? Calvin's attack on Nicodemism and religious compromise', *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* lxxvii (1985), 120-45. The setting up of a national synod in 1558 was an important step, especially as the Huguenots felt able to hold it in Paris where in the previous September there had been the incident at the Rue St Jacques. It had provoked a pamphlet war of which Knox's *Apology* was part: B. Diefendorf, 'Prologue to massacre: popular unrest in Paris, 1557-1572', *American Historical Review* xc (1985), 1067-91; D. Kelley, *The Beginning of Ideology*, Cambridge 1981, ch. iii.

⁵³ For example in Knox's *An Apology for the Protestants who are holden in Prison at Paris*, *Works*, iv. 324-5.

provided a sharp contrast to his demand that the English overthrow their Catholic regime, depose their monarch and substitute a godly Protestant commonwealth. The two voices of Knox can be recognised most easily in these two very different programmes for Protestant action in Scotland and England.

There is one point in his *Appellation* where it seems as if Knox wanted to go beyond this gradualist approach. This is in his discussion of idolatry, a subject which always aroused his fury, and from there Knox moved directly into the covenant argument.⁵⁴ He began by assuming that Scotland could be treated just like Israel in the Old Testament with its full panoply of covenant promises and obligations. Following the great biblical prophets, he could then recall the country to its religious duty and urge a return to its covenant with God. It was a slip of the mind and pen. In the summer of 1558 Scotland was not, in Knox's view, a covenanted nation because it had not yet openly avowed the Gospel and thereby entered into a covenant with God. All his previous uses of the covenant argument had been in relation to England, which had accepted the covenant despite its present backsliding under Mary. In his memorable phrase, 'we haif refusit the fellowship of God, and hes schakin hands with the Devill'.⁵⁵

In writing this section of the *Appellation* Knox was clearly thinking about England. He concluded his discussion of the covenant obligation with a radical statement about the *English* and not the Scottish situation:

I fear not to affirm that the dutie of the Nobilitie, Judges, Rulers and People of England, not only to have resisted and againstanded Marie, that Jesabel, whome they call their Queen, but also to have punished her to the death, with all the sort of her idolatrous Preestes, together with all such as should have assisted her, what tyme that shee and they openly began to suppress Christes Evangil, to shed the blood of the saints of God, and to erect that most divellish idolatrie... which ones most justly by commone othe was banished from that realme.⁵⁶

If Knox had seriously intended to employ the covenant argument in a Scottish context he would have done so in the *Letter to the Commonalty*. In this tract he relied entirely upon the premise that men shared a basic

⁵⁴ R. Mason, 'Covenant and commonweal', in N. Macdougall (ed.), *Church, Politics and Society*, Edinburgh 1983, 97-126. I am grateful to Dr Mason for our discussions on this point. On Knox's obsession with idolatry see R. Kyle, 'John Knox and the purification of religion: the intellectual aspects of his crusade against idolatry', *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* lxxvii (1986), 265-80. The general links between iconoclasm and resistance theories are discussed in C. M. N. Eire, *War Against the Idols*, Cambridge 1986, ch. vii.

⁵⁵ *Works*, iii. 199. This is found in *A Godly Letter of Warning or Admonition to the Faithful in London, Newcastle and Berwick* [1554], *Works*, iii. 157-216, which contains Knox's basic treatment of the covenant in relation to England: see Greaves, *Theology and Revolution*, ch. vi. On Knox's views about Scotland and the covenant in this period see R. Mason, 'Kingship and Commonweal: political thought and ideology in Reformation Scotland', unpubl. PhD diss., Edinburgh 1983, 289.

⁵⁶ *Works*, iv. 507.

religious equality. There was no hint of the obligation upon each individual to maintain and defend the covenant both personally and collectively.⁵⁷

The relatively cautious nature of Knox's programme of action for Scottish Protestants has been obscured by its association with the *First Blast* and by the confusing covenant passages in the *Appellation*. It has also been difficult to see its moderation behind the extremely violent and corrosive language Knox habitually employed in his writings. His main target was the Catholic priesthood, which was unsparingly attacked with rich invective punctuated by remarks about its tyranny.⁵⁸ This was a reference to the spiritual tyranny of the clergy and their religious persecution of the Protestants. The closest Knox came to attacking political tyranny was the assertion that the clergy were usurping political power and manipulating rulers to achieve their ends: a charge that was an old favourite of Protestant polemic.

Despite this attack upon the Catholic Church and his harsh words to the queen regent as an individual, Knox remained silent about her constitutional position and that of her daughter, Mary Queen of Scots. The situation was complicated by the minority of the queen and her continued absence from Scotland, leaving the country to be ruled by a regent for the foreseeable future. Knox believed that during such a regency the Scottish nobility were in a special position of authority.⁵⁹ He combined these Scottish constitutional traditions with similar views found in the theory of inferior magistracy.⁶⁰ This set of ideas had been developed by the Lutherans within the context of the Holy Roman Empire.⁶¹ They proved remarkably adaptable, and were successfully transposed to fit the very different constitutional arrangements which prevailed elsewhere. They were enthusiastically employed by Calvinist and other Protestant groups who found themselves in opposition to the kings and queens of Europe. Knox was acquainted with the Lutheran theories through such works as the *Magdeburg Confession* and through his extensive discussions about the

⁵⁷ This argument had been developed by Christopher Goodman, *How Superior Powers*.

⁵⁸ *Works*, iv. 515.

⁵⁹ I am grateful to Professor J. K. Cameron for this important suggestion. Traditionally the nobility had a major part to play during a regency in Scotland: Wormald, *Mary Queen of Scots*, 44–6.

⁶⁰ For the Scottish constitutional tradition see Mason, 'Kingship', pts 1 and 11; J. H. Burns, 'The Theory of Limited Monarchy in Sixteenth-century Scotland', unpubl. PhD diss., Aberdeen 1952, and see above nn. 3, 44; Greaves, *Theology and Revolution*, sect. 3; Kyle, *The Mind of John Knox*. For the most comprehensive treatment of the European theory of inferior magistracy see R. Benert, 'Inferior Magistrates in Sixteenth-Century Political Thought', unpubl. PhD diss., Minnesota 1967, chs. i–iv.

⁶¹ Q. Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, 2 vols, Cambridge 1978, ii. ch. vii; C. Shoenberger, 'The development of the Lutheran theory of resistance: 1523–30', *Sixteenth-Century Journal* viii (1977), 61–76; idem, 'Luther and the justifiability of resistance to legitimate authority', *Journal of the History of Ideas* xl (1979), 3–20; W. D. J. Cargill-Thompson, *Studies in the Reformation*, London 1980, chs. i–ii, and idem, *The Political Thought of Martin Luther*, Brighton 1984.

possibility of resistance in an English context during his exile.⁶² He seems quite naturally to have linked these ideas to the traditional view of the role of the nobility within the Scottish kingdom. He added and stressed the religious dimension to the general responsibilities of the nobles. Knox explained that in order to fulfil those onerous duties the nobility had been directly endowed by God with political power. In the *Appellation* he spelt out the duties of the Scottish nobility:

That ye whome God hath appointed heades in your commune welth ... do studie to promote the glorie of God; to provide that your subjects be rightly instructed in his true religion; that they be defended from all oppression and tirannie; that true teachers may be maintained, and such as blynde and deceive the people ... may be removed and punished as God's Law prescribeth.⁶³

It is worth noting in passing a suprising omission in Knox's *Appellation*. Though he had borrowed extensively from the Lutheran theorists, he failed to exploit an obvious opportunity to employ one of their well-known arguments. In their search for a convincing legal basis for resistance Gregory Bruck and the lawyers of Saxony had developed the doctrine of the 'unjust judge'.⁶⁴ They had taken the precept from canon law and combined it with the Roman private-law concept of repelling unjust force with force. They produced the argument that in certain circumstances it was legitimate to resist an unjust judge. They then transferred the whole doctrine of resisting an unjust judge into the public and constitutional realm and used it to justify resistance against the Emperor Charles v. Three types of case which permitted resistance to an unjust judge were identified. The first was when an appeal was pending; the second if a judge acted outwith his jurisdiction; and the third if a judge, though competent to try the case, then acted unjustly – and in the latter two instances the resulting injury was 'notorious' and 'irreparable'. These were then applied to the case of the emperor's dealings with the Protestants, particularly after the Diet of Augsburg in 1530 and the Protestant fear of the enforcement of its decrees. According to the theory the emperor had ceased to be a competent judge in the matter, and so it was possible for the Protestants to use the natural right of self-defence against an unwarranted attack. In this instance, because the emperor had ignored the appeal to the General Council of the Church, had acted outwith his jurisdiction, and had committed 'notorious' injustices, he ceased to have the authority to coerce and became a 'private man'. Any attempt by this 'private man' to enforce his will would constitute 'unjust force' and could be legitimately repelled. A legal justification for

⁶² E. Hildebrandt, 'The *Magdeburg Bekenntnis* as a possible link between German and English resistance theories in the sixteenth century', *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* lxxi (1980), 227–53; R. M. Kingdon, 'The first expression of Theodore Beza's political ideas', in Kingdon (ed.), *Church and Society in Reformation Europe*, London, 1985, ch. x; R. C. Gamble, 'The Christian and the tyrant: Beza and Knox on political resistance theory', *Westminster Theological Journal* xlvii (1984), 125–39.

⁶³ *Works*, iv. 480, 481–2.

⁶⁴ Skinner, *Modern Political Thought*, ii. 198–9.

resistance to the emperor in defence of the Protestant cause had been formulated and was even accepted, with considerable reluctance, by Luther himself as part of the Torgau Declaration.⁶⁵

The main burden of the theory rested upon the recognition of an 'unjust judge' and the matching of one or more of the three typical cases to a new set of circumstances. In the Lutheran situation, once the initial identification had been made, attention moved on to the question of 'notorious' injury and the restriction of a private individual's right to repel unjust force.⁶⁶ However, in his own recent experience Knox had all the key ingredients to make a case concerning an unjust judge and so be able to employ the whole theory of resistance which rested upon the identification. As its title indicated,⁶⁷ the *Appellation* was an appeal against a sentence of heresy. Knox had been tried in his absence and sentence pronounced after he had left Scotland in 1556. His effigy was subsequently burnt at the Cross of Edinburgh.⁶⁸ The process had angered Knox and so he had written the tract in his own defence. He first attacked the legal proceedings and then demanded the establishment of Protestantism in Scotland. The link between the two subjects was tenuous, being based upon the assumption that the heresy of which Knox was accused was in fact true doctrine and so should be recognised and established throughout Scotland. Knox used the association of ideas and not any formal connection to join his personal predicament to the general cause of promoting Protestantism. In the first dozen pages of his work Knox put forward his legal appeal before moving on to deal with the duties of the inferior magistrates and the need to establish Protestant worship.⁶⁹

The legal opening fell into two main sections, based upon two very different arguments. The first section appeared to be providing, in a careful and calculating manner, all the necessary ingredients for the identification of an unjust judge both on the grounds of a pending appeal and for injurious and unjust proceedings.⁷⁰ Knox demonstrated that to appeal his sentence was an established right, and that his particular appeal was legitimate. He also put forward arguments to suggest that the judges in this case were not impartial and so were not competent to sit in judgement against him. Knox seemed to have brought together from his own personal case all the requirements for the unjust judge theory which would enable him to move from his own specific legal action to a more general theory of resistance.

At this stage he halted and entirely changed his legal defence. He made a completely separate appeal from the ecclesiastical court (whose sentence

⁶⁵ Cargill-Thompson, *Political Thought*, 104-5.

⁶⁶ Skinner, *Modern Political Thought*, ii. 201-38.

⁶⁷ The full title ran 'The Appellation of John Knox from the cruell and most iniust sentence pronounced against him by the false bishoppes and clergie of Scotland, with his supplication and exhortation to the nobilitie, estates and communalitie of the same realme': *Works*, iv. 465. ⁶⁸ *John Knox's History*, i. 124. ⁶⁹ *Works*, iv. 467-79.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.* 469-72.

he now appeared to recognise) to the secular ruler. Knox's new plea was that his case should be freed from the judgement of the visible church and moved to the jurisdiction of the temporal magistrate. He declared, 'it is lauffull for the servantes of God to call for the help of the Civile Magistrate against the sentence of death'.⁷¹

Knox turned to his new theme with enthusiasm. He justified the wide jurisdiction over ecclesiastical matters enjoyed by the temporal ruler through the use of biblical examples. In particular he cited the troubles of Jeremiah and St Paul's appeal to the Roman Emperor. In this section Knox came very close to the full Lutheran position that the secular magistrate had jurisdiction over all aspects of temporal life including ecclesiastical ones.⁷²

The most obvious explanation for Knox's hasty retreat from using the doctrine of the 'unjust judge' to advocate resistance was that its implications were too radical for the Scottish situation in 1558. It had been used by Knox's friend Christopher Goodman to justify the call for resistance to a ruler by any individual irrespective of social status.⁷³ As with the covenant, such ideas were appropriate to the English situation and acceptable to Knox the Englishman, but were not employed by him in a Scottish context. Knox's abandonment of this argument in his *Appellation* as inappropriate for Scotland highlights his two voices. It demonstrates how important it is for the understanding of his religious and political thought to distinguish between his intended audiences. The purpose of the *First Blast* can only be properly understood when its English audience is recognised. Knox employed the general attack upon female rule as an approach to the problem of Mary Tudor rather than out of wholehearted commitment to the principle. His own subsequent willingness to accept female rulers, the Catholic Mary Queen of Scots as well as the Protestant Elizabeth, was less of a *volte-face* than has been supposed.⁷⁴ In its proper context as an 'English' tract the *First Blast* forms part of that special category of revolutionary works produced by the English exiles, especially those based at Geneva.

It is the Scottish writings which have suffered most from their association with Knox the Englishman. Freed from their revolutionary appendages they emerge as a coherent whole advocating a practical programme for the establishment of Protestantism by the Scottish Lords and commons. In their new guise they fit neatly into the broader canvas of Knox's personal and intellectual participation in the Scottish Revolution itself. The old tension is removed between Knox's relatively

⁷¹ Ibid. 473.

⁷² Ibid. 472-9; Skinner, *Modern Political Thought*, ii. ch. i; Cargill-Thompson, *Political Thought*, ch. vi.

⁷³ Goodman, *How Superior Powers*, 185.

⁷⁴ *John Knox's History*, ii. 15, and above n. 13. As late as 1571 Knox's attempts at compromise encouraged his enemies to charge him with inconsistency in attacking female rule and later supporting and praying for Queen Elizabeth; D. Calderwood, *The History of the Kirk of Scotland*, 8 vols, Edinburgh 1842-9, iii. 51-4.

quiescent political statements and behaviour after his return in May 1559 and his writings of the previous year. Shorn of these premature revolutionary elements, Knox's Scottish thought becomes more consistent and his co-operation with the Lords of the Congregation explicable. During those dramatic months of 1559–60 Knox's ideas changed to suit a rapidly developing situation.⁷⁵ These modifications are easier to detect now that the basic position has been established. The developments within Knox's political thought can be seen more clearly, and a more subtle and convincing explanation given of the changes which his thinking underwent throughout the whole of the 1550s and early 1560s.

As well as improving his overall consistency, the new perspective on Knox's Scottish thinking partly exonerates him from another charge. His shrewd Catholic adversary, Ninian Winzet, accused Knox of being an alien in his native country and by preference an Englishman, full of 'southron' speech and thinking.⁷⁶ As has been shown, Knox was indeed an Englishman by adoption, but he did not make the mistake of confusing his two homelands. At this stage he did not try to export his English ideas to Scotland, and offered a very different type of advice to each national group of Protestants. In his political and religious thought, if not in his English accent, Knox was careful to remain two men: the Scotsman by birth and the Englishman by adoption.

⁷⁵ For the later developments of Knox's thought and their Scottish context see Mason, 'Covenant and Commonweal', and 'Kingship and Commonweal', nn. 54, 55 above.

⁷⁶ *Certain Tractates... by Ninian Winzet*, ed. J. Hewison (Scottish Text Society), Edinburgh 1888, i. 138; cf. *Works*, iv. 439; J. H. Burns, 'Catholicism in defeat: Ninian Winzet, 1519–92', *History Today* xvi (1966), 788–95.